

Testimony provided by Jean Taylor, citizen and advocate for the aging

The Ombudsman program under the Older Americans Act was started in Kansas in 1975. At that time it was under SRS Services and had Edgerton Taylor hired as nursing home ombudsman. He investigated complaints and also had volunteer ombudsman to investigate complaints of nursing home residents. Soon it became obvious they couldn't handle all the complaints so AAA's hired directors to train volunteers to do the job. In 1978 Sister Kennedy continued the program and got enabling legislation to strengthen long term rights to enter homes and visit with residents. The program alternated with different administrations from volunteers to paid professional staff. In 1980 the program was under the Department of Aging with paid professional staff. A hotline was established to call in complaints to Topeka. In 1996 a pilot program was started in Kansas City and Topeka to train volunteers again to advocate for nursing home residents. Testimony was given to the legislature for a representative in every nursing home by 2000. This was to be accomplished by paid ombudsmen working with trained volunteers. It has not happened. There have never been enough volunteers to cover 450 nursing homes in Kansas. In 1999 Deanne Bacco of Kansas Advocates for Better Care came up with a unique plan that she presented to Silver Haired Legislature to meet the goal of a volunteer in every adult care home in the state. She said "we needed to recruit two kinds of volunteers, we need volunteers certified to investigate complaints and also volunteers who are not involved in complaint work. Every nursing home in Kansas has family members or close friends that visit on a regular basis each week. These people could be the eyes and ears for the volunteers and paid staff that are certified to investigate complaints. They would report observations to them and let them make decisions on what complaints were potential problems and needed to be investigated further. With additional PR on recruitment, TV, Radio, etc and using these people who are already in place and could be the vital link to finally reaching the goal of a representative in every home to help residents receive their rights that they are paying for in nursing homes. The frail elderly in nursing homes across Kansas are crying out for help. This could be a solution to their problems and be cost efficient. As well as meeting the goals we have been trying to have since 1975. The SHL passed this bill in 2000 and sent it to the legislature where it sat in committee and was never acted upon. It could be a win-win for the residents of nursing homes and the legislature.